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Finding Purpose Through Education and Coaching

EDWARD MACDONALD, BA '12, BRITTANY MACDONALD, BA '09, AND JOSHUA SHI, BA '17

HOMETOWN HERO: ANA GATSON, MSM '18 | ABOVE & BEYOND WITH CODY DOWNEY, BS '19 | KATIE MCSHANE'S HIGH TECH HUMANITY
STAYING THE COURSE WITH ADAM FITTING, BA '15 | THE 28TH ANNUAL GRANDE BALL | ALUMNI AMBASSADOR IDA BIDDLE-MAYER
PINNING CEREMONY FOR ACCELERATED 2ND DEGREE BSN PROGRAM | UNIVERSITY HOSTS MALE EMPOWERMENT EVENT

Finding Purpose Through Education and Coaching

For three Thomas Edison State University alumni - Edward Macdonald, BA '12, Brittany Macdonald, BA '09, and Joshua Shi, BA '17 - the inspiration to change their lives and launch their careers was the result of the educational opportunities afforded them at TESU.

The entrepreneurial cohort created AGL (Apex Generation Leadership), which uses coaching, training and consulting to create a culture of engagement within businesses and teams.

"We have a similar passion for wanting to live in a world where people wake up and say 'YAY, it's Monday' instead of 'It's Monday... I hate my job, my life, my colleagues.' All three of us have experienced a range of positive and negative emotions at our jobs in the past, and we know the difference between going to work and actually showing up for work. AGL develops teams who show up," explained Edward Macdonald, AGL's chief executive officer, who earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from the University in 2012.

The team initially found each other through an education technology program that partners with the University - Lumerit Education.

"Through Lumerit Education, we experienced firsthand the power of coaching to develop us as leaders and fell in love with what coaching could do," Macdonald added. "We each decided we wanted to become professional coaches, and we worked for that company for 13 years combined. That was where we all met. After several years of working with students who were transitioning into their first major job or career, we decided we wanted to work with developing leaders in a different context."

When forming their Colorado Springs-based company, they chose the name Apex Generation Leadership because

they believe that young adults in the American workforce - and the international workforce at large - are at the "Apex" of a major workplace transition.

Edward Macdonald noted that millennials and Generation Z are the largest demographic in the workforce today. "As a whole, many of them are not

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Edward Macdonald

ready to rise to the level of leadership that will soon be required of them. They are in desperate need of development and engagement, yet they also bring fresh ideas, skills and perspectives that have the potential to help businesses thrive in a modern world. Developing this potential is why AGL exists."

Chief Operating Officer Brittany Macdonald, who earned her TESU Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Sciences in 2009, agrees. "Every respected study out there shows that finding purpose in their job is crucial if they're going to stay longer than two years. We use coaching and team training to help professionals stay engaged, find purpose in their work and, ultimately, show up to a job they love every day. The result is a more engaged workforce that helps boost a company's bottom line."

As the director of the board, Shi, who holds a Bachelor of Arts (2017) degree in Communications with honors from TESU, is focused on helping others realize their unique sphere of influence and maximize their impact. He enjoys

mentoring young leaders and has guided numerous students through earning a degree, planning a career and achieving a well-lived life.

All three credit Thomas Edison State University with influencing them to find fulfilling careers that they are passionate about.

"Through TESU, I was able to clarify the bigger 'why' behind who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do," recalled Shi. "I gained communication skills, clarity around my future and the ability to really own my education. The decision to pursue a degree through TESU ultimately happened when I was empowered to understand what I wanted and to see how its program could help me get there sooner."

Brittany Macdonald explained that she chose to complete her education at TESU in a way that allowed her to travel, run political campaigns and manage a small business alongside earning her degree. "As a result, I graduated two years earlier than my peers and was able to start my career - an opportunity that





From left to right: Edward Macdonald, BA '12, Brittany Macdonald, BA '09, and Joshua Shi, BA '17

has directly contributed to my ability to start and run a business.”

“I like the caliber of students TESU attracts and supports,” said Edward Macdonald. “Thomas Edison State University has built an atmosphere of purposeful education for adults who are pursuing their next step because they want it, not simply because it’s the next thing to do. TESU allowed me to graduate without debt, which has facilitated my investment of time, effort and resources into building and operating this business,” said Macdonald, who is responsible for maintaining the vision, strategy and culture within the AGL team.

On a day-to-day basis, his duties can range from strategic business planning and speaking engagements, to facilitating communication with AGL’s offsite team of coaches and contractors, to meeting with business partners and representing AGL to the community. He holds six coaching certifications from the Applied Neuroscience Institute, The Center for Coaching Excellence and Coach Training EDU as well as the industry’s top credential as a

Master Certified Coach through the International Coaching Federation (ICF). Macdonald noted he has a wide range of interests, from the outdoors to music to cooking and being a handyman.

Brittany Macdonald’s passion is to help people align their thinking and their actions to move them more effectively toward their goals. She does this through managing the day-to-day logistics and operations of the team and also enjoys teaching, speaking engagements, developing course content and programs, and coach training. She holds several coaching certifications, including her credential as Master Certified Coach with ICF as well as certifications in Risk Avoidance, Non-Violent Crisis Intervention, Leadership and additional training in Applied Bioethics. In her spare time, Macdonald said she “enjoys hiking, exploring new coffee shops, reading anything I can get my hands on and investing time in friends and community.”

Shi, who initially built the AGL brand and led the marketing efforts for the company, now focuses on providing feedback and guidance to the team as

they continue to grow. He is a certified Academic Life Coach, holds a Signature Leadership certificate and continues to study life coaching. Though he originally hails from Massachusetts, he currently resides in Colorado, which he loves but says is just a little too far from the ocean for his taste. In his free time, Shi enjoys sailing, good books, deep friendships and adventure.

Edward and Brittany’s similar passions and backgrounds eventually led to building more than a business together. They were married March 1, 2019, and continue to thrive as life partners as well as business partners.

All three have also had personal challenges that may have guided them to their corresponding careers as coaches and mentors.

Edward Macdonald was very close to his younger special needs brother, who passed on New Year’s Eve, 2018. “Josh was three years younger than me, and he never let his health challenges keep him from pursuing life with positivity and joy. He tackled his dreams fearlessly and encouraged me to do the same,” Macdonald remembered. “I miss him every day.”

Brittany Macdonald, whose sister, Alyssa, also has special needs, noted “her love and enthusiasm for life is a driving factor in doing what I do. If she can wake up every day with the limitations and challenges she faces and embrace life without fear, I am convinced the rest of us can learn to do the same.”

Shi, who has dealt with Crohn’s disease for the past several years that resulted in a rare complication of stage 3 kidney failure, explained, “I have learned a lot about myself through the process...and while it has been one of the hardest challenges in my life, it’s not something I would change...or let it stop me from pursuing the things that are most important to me.”

Edward Macdonald summed up what working in a “job you love” means, not only to AGL’s clients but also to its team.

“Our mission is to help teams engage with each other and their work so everyone can look forward to Monday. We hope to build a world where everyone can spend the better half of their waking life engaged in meaningful work they love. We are thankful to TESU for the role it played in facilitating our growth and development, and the start of this journey.”